

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1474
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0580

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR MOPS SY LE
SUBJ: SYRIAN FORCES IN LEBANON MOVE AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND
PALESTINIANS

REF: BEIRUT 0273

1. SUMMARY: SYRIAN THRUST INTO EAST BEIRUT AND NABATIYAH
REPORTEDLY PRECEDED BY ORDER FROM ASAD TO ATTACK PALESTINIAN
CAMPS IN BEIRUT ON PRETEXT OF COLLECTING HEAVY
WEAPONS. SYRIAN MILITARY COMMANDER IN BEIRUT REFUSED ORDER
ON GROUNDS IT NOT EVEN-HANDED AND WOULD RISK JEOPARDIZING
NSSWYALTY OF SYRIAN TROOPS. ASAD RESCINDED ORDER BUT IN-
DICATIONS OF SYRIAN IRRITATION WITH SARKIS ARE INCREASING.
CONVERSELY, WITH REINFORCEMENT OF SYRIAN TROOPS IN EAST
BEIRUT, MARONITES WILL PROBABLY MAKE MORE OF A POLITICAL
ISSUE OF SYRIAN PRESENCE IN LEBAMOC. END SUMMARY.

2. MOVEMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES BELONGING TO ADF INTO EAST
BEIRUT AND TOWARD NABATIYAH (REFTEL) APPARENTLY MARKED CHANGE
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OF PLANS FROM ORIGINAL SYRIAN OPERATION AIMED AT CONDUCTING
HEAVY WEAPONS SEARCHES AT PALESTINIAN CAMPS. WE LEARNED
FROM LOCAL DISSIDENT SOURCE JAN 21 THAT PRES ASAD HAD
RECENTLY ORDERED ONE OF HIS MILITARY COMMANDERS IN BEIRUT
HEADQUARTERED IN HAZMIEH TO CONDUCT OPERATION AGAINST
PALESTINIAN CAMPS UNDER PRETEXT OF SEIZING HEAVY WEAPONS
(SOURCE PROBABLY REFERRING TO TAWFIQ JALLUL, ALAWITE OFFICER

WHO AS BRIGADE COMMANDER DURING 1973 GOLAN BATTLE EMERGED AS LOCAL HERO). COMMANDER REFUSED, AND REQUESTED MEETING IN DAMASCUS WITH PRES TO EXPLAIN HIS POSITION. HE EXPLAINED THAT ATTACK AGAINST CAMPS WOULD APPEAR AS ALAWITE RATHER THAN SYRIAN ATTACK BECAUSE IT EXCLUDED TARGETS IN MARONITE REGION. SECOND, HE COULD NOT GUARANTEE HIS TROOPS WOULD OBEY ORDERS.

3. TO COMMANDER'S SURPRISE, ASAD REPORTEDLY BACKED OFF AND IS HIS PRESENCE RESCINDED ORDER. ASAD THEN CLAIMED HE HAD BEEN ASSURED BY ZUHAYR MUHSIN THAT ATTACK COULD PROCEED WITHOUT UNDUE DIFFICULTY. COMMANDER, INCREDULOUS THAT ASAD ASSIGNING SUCH CREDIBILITY TO MUHSIN'S ANALYSIS, ADVISED ASAD THAT MUHSIN WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A "JOKE" IN LEBANON AND WOULD NOT EVEN BE RECEIVED BY SYRIAN TROOPS, MUCH LESS PALESTINIANS. MEETING ENDED AMICABLY, ACCORDING TO SOURCE, WITH COMMANDER THREATENING TO SHOOT MUHSIN IF SAIQA LEADER DISCOVERED IN HIS MILITARY DISTRICT.

4. EMBOFF LEARNED JAN 24 FROM LOCAL CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LEADER, WHO IN LEBANON PREVIOUS WEEK, THAT TAWFIQ JALLUL HAD RECENTLY EXCLAIMED BEFORE LARGE GATHING OF OFFICIALS IN BEIRUT THAT "OUR TROOPS ARE READY TO BEGIN HEAVY WEAPONS COLLECTION, BUT ORDER MUST COME FROM SARKIS. WE ARE WAITING FOR HIS ORDER." THIS SOURCE, WHO WORKS CLOSELY WITH SYRIANS, SAID THAT JALLUL WAS TRYING TO APPLY PRESSURE ON SARKIS TO ORDER ADF INTO EAST BEIRUT SO THAT OPERATIONS WOULD MAINTAIN APPEARANCE OF EVEN-HANDEDNESS. BUT, SOURCE SAID, SYRIAN MILITARY COMMANDER WAS GROWING INCREASINGLY CONFIDENTIAL

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IMPATIENT WITH SARKIS' CAUTIOUS APPROACH, AND NOW BELIEVED OTHER MARONITE LEADERS -- ESPECIALLY KASSIS AND CHAMOUN -- WERE SUCCESSFULLY RESTRICTING SARKIS' MANEUVERABILITY ON THIS ISSUE.

5. WE HAVE RECEIVED OTHER INDICATIONS OF GROWING DISSATISFACTION ON PART OF SARG TOWARD SARKIS AND MARONITES. SAME SOURCE PARAS ONE AND TWO SAID AL-NAHAR COLUMNIST MICHEL ABU JAWDEH RECENTLY IN DAMASCUS. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, ABU JAWDEH RELAYED TO HIM THAT SARKIS BECOMING LESS RESPONSIVE TO SYRIANS AND MORE SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN PRESENCE.

6. THIS SOURCE ADDED THAT EDITOR OF JUMBLATT'S NEWSPAPER IN LEBANON, FNU RAAD, HAS ALSO BEEN IN DAMASCUS RECENTLY AND HELD ROUND OF TALKS WITH FONMIN KHADDAM, COS SHIHABI AND NUMBER OF OTHER SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, SYRIANS HAVE OBTAINED INFORMATION THAT JUMBLATT TRYING TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE WITH MARONITES AGAINST SYRIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON. RAAD REASSURED BY HIS HOSTS THAT

"SYRIAN ALLIANCE WITH CHRISTIANS" WAS ONLY TEMPORARY
"ABERRATION" IN SYRIAN POLICY AND WOULD BE CORRECTED.

7. COMMENT:

SYRIANS WILL BE INCREASINGLY FACED WITH ACCUSATIONS
THEY PLAYING SECTARIAN POLITICS IN LEBANON. IN TRYING
DEMONSTRATE THEIR EVENHANDEDNESS, SYRIANS HAVE INEVITABLY
ANGERED MANY MARONITES, A DEVELOPMENT WHICH WILL ENHANCE
MARONITE RECEPTIVITY TO VIEWS OF THOSE WISHING DEPICT
ADF AS SYRIAN OCCUPATION FORCE AND TURN THIS INTO A
MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE. THRUST BY SYRIAN TROOPS INTO
EAST BEIRUT, WE ASSUME, IS OPENING OF MAJOR DRIVE TO
ROUND UP HEAVY WEAPONRY IN POSSESSION OF CHRISTIANS AND
THEIR PUSH SOUTHWARDS HAS SAME PURPOSE VIS-A-VIS
PALESTINIANS. FINALLY, JALLUL'X
REFUSAL OF ORDER FROM
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DAMASCUS, IF AN ACCURATE REPORT, ILLUSTRATES DIFFICULTY
OF MANAGING MILITARY OPERATIONS IN LEBANON FROM THIS
DISTANCE.
MURPHY

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